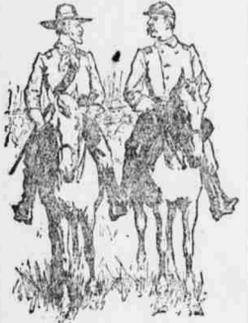




CHAPTER XVIII.

The sun is not an hour high, but the bivouac at the springs is far behind. With advance guard and flankers well out, the regiment is tramping its way, full of eagerness and spirit. The men can hardly refrain from bursting into song, but although at "route stop" the fact that Indian scouts have already been sighted scurrying from bluff to bluff is sufficient to warn all hands to be silent and alert. Witton, with his company, is on the dangerous flank and guards it well. Armitage, with Company B, covers the advance, and his men are strung out in long skirmish line across the trail wherever the ground is sufficiently open to admit of deployment. Where it is not, they spring ahead and explore every point where Indian may lurk and render ambuscade of the main column impossible. With Armitage is McLeod, the cavalry sergeant who made the night ride with the scout who bore the dispatches. The scout has galloped on toward the railway with news of the rescue; the sergeant guides the infantry re-enforcement. Observant men have noted that Armitage and the sergeant have had a vast deal to say to each other during the chill hours of the early morn. Others have noted that at the first brief halt the captain rode back, called Colonel Maynard to one side and spoke to him in low tones. The colonel was seen to start with astonishment. Then he said a few words to his second in command and rode forward with Armitage to join the advance. When the regiment moved on again and the head of column here in sight of the skirmishers, they saw that the colonel, Armitage and the sergeant of cavalry were riding side by side, and that the officers were paying



Armitage and the sergeant of cavalry were riding side by side.

close attention to all the dragon was saying. All were eager to hear the particulars of the condition of affairs at the camp, and all were disposed to be envious of the mounted captain who could ride alongside the one participant in the rescuing charge and get it all at first hand. The field officers, of course, were mounted, but every line officer marched afoot with his men, except that three horses had been picked up at the railway and impressed by the quartermaster in case of need, and these were assigned to the captains who happened to command the skirmishers and flankers.

But no man had the faintest idea what manner of story that tall sergeant was telling. It would have been of interest to every soldier in the command, but to no one so much so as to the two who were his absorbed listeners. Armitage, before his early march, had frankly and briefly set before him his suspicions as to the case and the trouble in which Miss Renwick was involved. No time was to be lost. Any moment might find them plunged in fierce battle, and who could foretell the results, who could say what might happen ere reaching the ears of her rescuers? Some men wondered why it was that Colonel Maynard sent his compliments to Captain Chester and begged that at the next halt he would join him. The halt did not come for a long hour, and when it did come it was very brief, but Chester received another message and went forward to find his colonel sitting in a little grove with the cavalryman while the orderly held their horses a short space away. Armitage had gone forward to his advance, and Chester showed no surprise at the sight of the sergeant seated side by side with the colonel and in confidential converse with him. There was a quaint little twinkle in Maynard's eyes as he greeted his old friend.

"Chester," said he, "I want you to be better acquainted with my stepson, Mr. Renwick. He has an apology to make to you."

The tall soldier had risen the instant he caught sight of the newcomer, and even at the half playful tone of the colonel would relax in no degree his soldierly sense of the proprieties. He stood erect and held his hand at the salute, only very slowly lowering it to take the one so frankly extended him by the captain, who, however, was grave and quiet.

"I have suspected as much since day-break," he said, "and no man is gladder to know it is you than I am."

"You would have known it before, sir, had I had the faintest idea of the danger in which my foolhardiness had involved my sister. The colonel has told you of my story. I have told him and Captain Armitage what led to my mad freak at Sibley, and while I have much to make amends for I want to apologize for the blow I gave you that night on the terrace. I was far more scared than you were, sir."

say the least," replied the colonel, "but he never realized the consequences until Armitage told him today. You must hear his story in brief, Chester. It is needless that three or four of us know it, so that some may be left to set things right at Sibley. God grant us all safe returns!" he added piously, and with deep emotion. "I can far better appreciate our home and happiness than I could a month ago. Now, Rowick, tell the captain what you have told us."

And briefly it was told—how in his youthful feet he had sworn never again to set foot within the door of the father and mother who had so wronged the poor girl he loved with boyish fervor; how he called down the vengeance of heaven upon them in his frenzy and distress; how he had sworn never again to set eyes on their faces. "May God strike me dead if ever I return to the city until she is avenged! May he deal with you as you have dealt with her!" was the curse that flew from his wild lips, and with that he left them, stunned. He went west, was soon penniless, and caring not what he did, seeking change, adventure, anything to take him out of his past, he enlisted in the cavalry and was speedily drafted to the front, which was just starting forth on a stirring summer campaign. He was a fine horseman, a fine shot, a man who instantly attracted the notice of his officers. The campaign was full of danger, adventure, rapid and constant marching, and before he knew it or dreamed it possible he had become deeply interested in his new life.

Only in the monotony of a month or two in garrison that winter did the service seem intolerable. His comrades were rough in the main, but thoroughly good hearted, and he soon won their esteem. The spring sent them again into the field, another stirring campaign, and here he won his stripes and words of praise from the lips of a veteran general officer as well as the promise of future reward, and then the love of soldierly deeds and the thirst for soldierly renown took firm hold in his breast. He began to turn toward the mother and father who had been wrung up in his future, who loved him so devotedly. He was forgetting his early and passionate love, and the bitter sorrow of her death was losing fast its poignant power to steel him against his kindred. He knew they could not but be proud of the record he had made in the ranks of the gallant 10th, and then he branched and shivered when he recalled the dreadful words of his curse. He had made up his mind to write, implore pardon for his hideous and unfeeling language and invoke their interest in his career, when, returning to Fort Raines for supplies, he picked up a New York paper in the reading room and read the announcement of his father's death, "whose health had been broken ever since the disappearance of his only son, two years before." The memory of his malediction had indeed come home to him, and he fell stricken by a sudden and unaccountable blow. It seemed as though his heart had given one wild leap, then stopped forever. Things did not go so well after this. He brooded over his words and believed that an avenging God had launched the bolt that killed the father as punishment for the stubborn and reckless son. He then thought of his mother, of pretty Alice, who had loved him so as a little girl. He could not bring himself to write, but through inquiries he learned that the house was closed and that they had gone abroad. He plodded on in his duties a trying year; then came more lively field work and reviving interest. He was forgetting entirely the sting of his first great sorrow and mourning gravely the grief he had placed 'twixt him and his.

He thought time and again of his cruel words, and something began to whisper to him he must see that mother again at once, kiss her hand and implore her forgiveness, or she, too, would be stricken suddenly. He saved up his money hoping that after the summer's ride work at Sibley he might get a furlough and go east, and the night he arrived at the fort, tired with his long railway journey and panting after a long and difficult climb up hill, his mother's face swam suddenly before his eyes, and he felt himself going down. When they brought him to, he heard that the ladies were Mrs. Maynard and her daughter, Miss Renwick—his own mother, remarried; his own Alice, a grown young woman. This was indeed news to put him in a flutter and spoil his shooting. He realized at once that the girl was wider than ever. How could he go to her now, the wife of a colonel, and he an enlisted man? Like other soldiers, he forgot that the line of demarcation was one of discipline, not of sympathy. He did not realize what any soldier among his officers would gladly have told him—that he was most worthy to reveal himself now, a non-commissioned officer whose record was an honor to himself and to his regiment, a soldier of whom officers and comrades alike were proud. He never dreamed—indeed, how few there are who do—that a man of his character, standing and ability is honored and respected by the very men whom the customs of the service require him to speak with only when spoken to. He supposed that only as Fred Renwick could he extend his hand to one of their number, whereas it was under his soldier name he won their trust and admiration, and it was as Sergeant McLeod the officers of the 10th were backing him for a commission that would make him what they deemed him fit to be—their equal.

Unable to penetrate the armor of reserve and discipline which separates the officer from the rank and file, he never imagined that the colonel would have been the first to welcome him had he known the truth. He believed that now his last chance of seeing his mother was gone. Then came another blow! The doctor told him that with his heart trouble he could never pass the physical

examination. He could not hope for preferment, then, and must see her as he was and see her secretly and alone. Then came blow after blow. His shooting had failed, so had that of others of his regiment, and he was ordered to return in charge of the party early on the morrow. The order reached him late in the evening, and before breakfast time on the following day he was directed to start with his party for town, thence by rail to his distant post. That night, in desperation, he made his plan. Twice before he had strolled down to the post, and with yearning eyes had studied every feature of the colonel's house. He dared ask no questions of servants or of the men in garrison, but he learned enough to know which rooms were theirs, and he had noted that the windows were always open. If he could only see their loved faces, kneel and kiss his mother's hand, pray God to forgive him, he could go away believing that he had undone the spell and revoked the malediction of his early youth. It was hazardous, but worth the danger. He could go in peace and sin no more toward mother, at least, and then if she mourned and missed him could he not find it out some day and make himself known to her after his discharge? He slipped out of camp, leaving his boots behind and wearing his light Apache moccasins and flannel shirt and trousers. Danger to himself he had no great fear of. If by any chance mother or sister should wake, he had but to stretch forth his hand and say, "It is only I—Fred." Danger to them he never dreamed of.

Strong and athletic, despite his slender frame, he easily lifted the ladder from Jerrold's fence, and dodging the sentry when he spotted him at the gate finally took it down back of the colonel's and raised it to a rear window. By the strangest chance the window was closed, and he could not budge it. Then he heard the challenge of a sentry around on the east front and had just time to slip down and lower the ladder when he heard the rattle of a sword and knew it must be the officer of the day. There was no time to carry off the ladder. He left it lying where it was and sprang down the steps toward the station. Soon he heard No. 5 challenge and knew the officer had passed on; waited some time, but nothing occurred to indicate that the ladder was discovered, and then, plucking up courage and with a muttered prayer for guidance and protection, he stole up hill again, raised the ladder to the west wall, noiselessly ascended, peered in Alice's window and could see a faint night light burning in the hall beyond, but that all was darkness there, stole around on the roof of the piazza to the hall window, stepped noiselessly upon the sill, climbed over the lowered sash and found himself midway between the rooms. He could hear the colonel's placid snoring and the regular breathing of the other sleepers. No time was to be lost. Shading the little night lamp with one hand, he entered the open door, stole to the bedside, took one long look at his mother's face, knelt, breathed upon, but barely brushed with his trembling lips, the queenly white hand that lay upon the coverlet, poured forth one brief prayer to God for protection and blessing for her and forgiveness for him, retraced his steps and caught sight of the lovely picture of Alice in the director's costume. He longed for it and could not resist. She had grown so beautiful, so exquisite. He took it, frame and all, carried it into her room, slipped the card from its place and hid it inside the breast of his shirt, stowed the frame away behind her sofa pillow, then looked long at the lovely picture she herself made, lying there sleeping sweetly and peacefully amid the white drapings of her dainty bed. Then 'twas time to go. He put the lamp back in the hall, passed through her room, out at her window and down the ladder and hid it well on the way back to the hooks on Jerrold's fence when seized and challenged by the officer of the day. Mad terror possessed him then. He struck blindly, dashed off in panicky flight, paid no heed to sentry's cry or whistling missile, but tore like a racer up the path and never slackened speed till Sibley was far behind.

When morning came, the order that they should go was temporarily suspended. Some prisoners were sent to a neighboring military prison, and he was placed in charge, and on his return from this duty learned that the colonel's family had gone to Sablon. The next thing there was some strange talk that worried him—a story that one of the men who had a sweetheart who was second girl at Mrs. Hoyt's brought out to camp—a story that there was an officer who was too much in love with Alice to keep away from the house even after the colonel so ordered, and that he was prowling around the other night, and the colonel ordered Leary to shoot him—Leary, who was on post on No. 5. He felt sure that something was wrong—felt sure that it was due to his night visit—and his first impulse was to find his mother and confide the truth to her. He longed to see her again, and if harm had been done to make himself known and explain everything. Having no duties to detain him, he got a pass to visit town and permission to be gone a day or more. On Saturday evening he ran down to Sablon, drove over, as Captain Armitage had already told them, and peering in his mother's room saw her, still up, though in her nightgown. He never dreamed of the colonel's being out and watching. He had "scouted" all those trees, and no one was night. Then he softly called. She heard and was coming to him, when again came fierce attack. He had all a soldier's reverence for the person of the colonel and would never have harmed him had he known 'twas he. It was the night watchman that had grappled with him, he supposed, and he had no compunctions in sending him to grass. Then he fled again, knowing that he had only made bad worse, walked all that night to the station next north of Sablon—a big town, where the early morning train always stopped—and by 10 on Sunday morning he was in uniform again and off with his regimental comrades under orders to haste to their station—there was trouble with the Indians at Spirit Rock, and the 10th were held in readiness. From beneath his scouting shirt he drew a flat packet, an Indian case, which he carefully unrolled, and there in its folds of wrappings was the lovely director's photograph.

Where, then, was the one that Sibley had seen in Jerrold's room? It was that that Armitage had gone forward to determine, and he found his sad-eyed lieutenant with the skirmishers.

"Jerrold," said he, with softened manner, "a strange thing is brought to light this morning, and I lose no time in telling you. The man who was seen at Maynard's quarters, coming from Miss Renwick's room, was her own brother and the colonel's stepson. He was the man who took the photograph from Mrs. Maynard's room and has proved it this very day, this very hour." Jerrold glanced up in sudden surprise. "He is with us now, and only one thing remains, which you can clear up. We are going into action, and I may not get through, nor you, nor—who knows who. Will you tell me now how you came by your copy of that photograph?"

For answer Jerrold fumbled in his pocket a moment and drew forth two letters.

"I wrote these last night, and it was my intention to see that you had them before it grew very hot. One is addressed to you, the other to Miss Beaubien. You had better take them now," he said wearily. "There may be no time to talk after this. Send hers after it's over, and don't read yours until then."

"Why, I don't understand this exactly," said Armitage, puzzled. "Can't you tell me about the picture?"

"No, I promised not to while I lived, but it's the simplest matter in the world, and no one at the colonel's had a hand in it. They never saw this one that I got to show Sibley. It is signed now. I said 'Fred' given me. That was hardly the truth. I have paid for it dearly enough."

"And this note explains it?"

"Yes. You can read it tomorrow."

CHAPTER XIX.

And the morrow has come. Down in a deep and bluff shadowed valley, hung all around with picturesque crags and pine crested heights, under a cloudless September sun, whose warmth is tempered by the mountain breeze, a thousand rough looking, bronzed and bearded and powder blackened men are resting after battle.

Here and there on distant ridge and point the cavalry videttes kept vigilant watch against surprise or renewed attack. Down along the banks of a clear, running stream a sentry paces slowly by the brown line of rifles, swivel stacked in the bushes. Men by the dozen are washing their blistered feet and gray hands and faces in the cool, refreshing water; men by the dozen lie soundly sleeping, some in the broad grass, some in the shade of the little clump of willows, all heedless of the pestering swarms of flies. Out on the broad, grassy slopes, side lined and watched by keen-eyed guards, the herds of cavalry horses are quietly grazing, forgetful of the wild excitement of yesterday. Every now and then some one of them lifts his head, pricks up his ears and snorts and stamps suspiciously as he sniffs at the puffs of smoke that come drifting up the valley from the fires a mile away. The waking men, too, being an occasional comment on the odor which greets their nostrils. Down stream, where the fires are burning, are the blackened remnants of a wagon train. Tires, bolts and axles are lying about, but all woodwork is in smoldering ashes; so, too, is all that remains of several hundredweight of stores and supplies destined originally to nourish the Indians, but, by them, diverted to feed the fire.

There is a big circle of seething flame and rolling smoke here, too—a maddening neighborhood, around which fatigued parties are working with averted heads, and among them some surly and unwilling Indians, driven to labor at the muzzle of threatening revolver or carbine, aid in dragging to the flames carcasses of horse and mule, and in gathering together and throwing on the pyre an array of miscellaneous soldier garments, blouses, shirts and trousers, all more or less hacked and blood stained, all of no more use to mortal wearer.

Out on the southern slopes, just where a ravine crowded with wild rose bushes opens into the valley, more than half the command is gathered, formed in rectangular lines about a number of shallow, elongated pits, in each of which there lies the stiffening form of a comrade who but yesterday joined in the battle cheer that burst upon the valley with the setting sun. Silent and reverent they stand in their rough campaign gear. The escort of infantry "rests on arms"; the others bow their uncovered heads, and it is the voice of the veteran colonel that, in accents trembling with sympathy and emotion, renders the last tribute, to fallen comrades and lifts to heaven the prayers for the dead. Then so! The morning comes, break away from the southern side, the brown mists of the escort are lifted in air, the listening rocks resound to the madden ring of the flashing volley, the soft, low wailing goodby of the trumpets goes floating up the vale, and soon the burial parties are left alone to cover the once familiar faces with the earth to which the soldier must return, and the comrades who are left, foot and dragon, come marching, silent, back to camp.

And when the old regiment begins its homeward journey, leaving the well worn field to the fast arriving commands and bidding hearty soldier farewells to the cavalry comrades whose friendship they gained in the front of a savage foe, the company that was the first to land its fire in the fight goes back with diminished numbers and under command of its second lieutenant. Alas, poor Jerrold!

There was a solemn little group around the campfire the night before they go. Frank Armitage, flat on his back, with a rifle bullet through his thigh, but taking things very coolly for all that, is having a quiet conference with his colonel. Such of the wounded of the entire command as are well enough to travel by easy stages to the railway go with Maynard and the regiment in the morning, and Sergeant McLeod, with his saber arm in a sling, is one of these. But the captain of Company B must wait until the surgeons can lift him along in an ambulance and a calf of fever has subsided. To the colonel and Chester he hands the note which is all that is left to comfort poor Nina Beaubien. To them he reads aloud the note addressed to himself:

"You are right in saying that the matter of my possession of that photograph should be explained. I seek no longer to palliate my action. In making that pupfish bet with Sibley I did believe that I could induce Miss Renwick or her mother to let me have a copy, but I was refused so positively that I knew it was useless. This sippily added

to my desire to have one. The photographer was the same that took the pictures and furnished the albums for our class at graduation, and I, more than any one, had been instrumental in getting the order for him against very active opposition. He had always professed the greatest gratitude to me and a willingness to do anything for me. I wrote him in strict confidence, told him of the intimate and close relations existing between the colonel's family and me, told him I wanted it to enlarge and present to her mother on her approaching birthday and promised him that I would never reveal how I came by the picture so long as I lived, and he sent me one—just in time. Have I not paid heavily for my sin?"

No one spoke for a moment. Chester was the first to break the silence:

"Poor fellow! He kept his word to the photographer, but what was it worth to a woman?"

There had been a week of wild anxiety and excitement at Sibley. It was known through the columns of the press that the regiment had hurried forward from the railway the instant it reached the Colorado trail; that it could not hope to get through to the valley of the Spirit Wolf without a fight, and that the moment it succeeded in joining hands with the cavalry already there a vigorous attack would be made on the Indians. The news of the rescue of the survivors of Thornton's command came first, and with it the tidings that Maynard and his regiment were met only 30 miles from the scene and were pushing forward. The next news came two days later, and a wait went up even while men were shaking hands and rejoicing over the gallant fight that had been made, and women were weeping for joy and thanking God that those whom they held dearest were safe. It was down among the wives of the sergeants and other veterans that the blow struck hardest at Sibley, for the stricken officers were unmarried men, while among the rank and file there were several who bore their names. Company B had suffered most for the Indians had charged fiercely on its deployed but steadfast line. Armitage almost choked and broke down when telling the colonel about it that night as he lay under the willows. "It was the first smile I had seen on his face since I got back—that with which he looked up in my eyes and whispered goodby—and died, just after we drove

CHAPTER XX.

They were having a family convale at Sablon. The furlough granted Sergeant McLeod on account of wound received in action with hostile Indians would soon expire, and the question was, Should he ask an extension, apply for a discharge or go back and rejoin his troop? It was a matter on which there was much diversity of opinion. Mrs. Maynard should naturally be permitted first choice, and to her wish there was every reason for according deep and tender consideration. No words can tell of the rapture of that reunion with her long lost son. It was a scene over which the colonel could never ponder without deep emotion. The telegrams and letters by which he carefully prepared her for Frederick's coming were all insufficient. She knew well that her boy must have greatly changed and matured, but when this tall, bronzed, bearded, stalwart man sprang from the old red omnibus and threw his one serviceable arm around her trembling form the mother was utterly overcome.

Alice left them alone together a full hour before even she intruded, and little by little, as the days went by and Mrs. Maynard realized that it was really her Fred who was whistling about the cottage or booming trooper songs in his great basso profundo and glorying in his regiment and the cavalry life he had led, a wonderful content and joy shone in her handsome face. It was not until the colonel announced that it was about time for them to think of going back to Sibley that the cloud came. Fred said he couldn't go.

In fact, the colonel himself had been worrying a little over it. As Fred Renwick, the tall, distinguished young man in civilian costume, he would be welcome anywhere; but, though his garb was that of the sovereign citizen so long as his furlough lasted, there were but two weeks more of it left, and officially he was nothing more nor less than Sergeant McLeod, Troop B, 10th cavalry, and there was no precedent for a colonel's entertaining as an honored guest and social equal one of the enlisted men of the army. He rather hoped that Fred would yield to his mother's entreaties and apply for a discharge. His wound and the latent trouble with his heart would probably render it an easy matter to obtain, and yet he was ashamed of himself for the feeling.

Then there was Alice. It was hardly to be supposed that so very high bred a young woman would relish the idea of being seen around Fort Sibley on the arm of her brother, the sergeant; but, wonderful to relate, Miss Alice took a radically different view of the whole situation. So far from wishing Fred out of the army, she importuned him day after day until he got out his best uniform, with its resplendent chevrons and stripes of vivid yellow and the yellow helmet cords, though they were but humble workaday, and when he came forth in that dress, with the bronze medal on his left breast and the sharpshooters' silver cross, his tall, athletic figure showing to such advantage, his dark, southern, manly features so enhanced by contrast with his yellow facings, she clasped her hands with a cry of delight and sprang into his one available arm and threw her own about his neck and kissed him again and again.

Even mamma had to admit he looked astonishingly well, but Alice declared she would never thereafter be reconciled to seeing him in anything but a cavalry uniform. The colonel found her not at all of her mother's way of thinking. She saw no reason why Fred should leave the service. Other sergeants had won their commissions every year. Why not he? Even if it were some time in coming, was there shame or degradation in being a cavalry sergeant? Not a bit of it! Fred himself was loath to quit. He was getting a little homesick, too—homesick for the boundless life and space and air of the broad frontier, homesick for the rapid movement and vigorous hours in the saddle and on the scout. His arm was healing, and such a delight of a letter had come from his captain, telling him that the adjutant had just been to see him about the new staff of the regiment. The gallant sergeant major, a young Prussian of marked ability, had been killed early in the campaign. The vacancy must soon be filled, and the colonel and the adjutant both thought at once of Sergeant McLeod. "I won't stand in your way, sergeant," wrote his troop commander, "but you know that old Ryan is to be discharged at the end of his sixth enlistment, the 10th of next month. There is no man I would sooner see in his place as first sergeant of my troop than yourself, and I hate to lose you. But, as it will be for the gain and the good of the whole regiment, you ought to accept the adjutant's offer. All the men rejoice to hear you are recovering so fast, and all will be glad to see Sergeant McLeod back again."

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His letter explained it all. She had received it with a paroxysm of passionate grief and joy, kissed it, covered it with wildest caresses before she began to read, and then, little by little, as the words unfolded before her staring eyes, turned cold as stone:

"It is my last night of life, Nina, and I am glad 'tis so. Proud and sensitive as I am, the knowledge that every

man in my regiment has turned from me; that I have not a friend among them; that there is no longer a place for me in their midst—more than all, that I deserve their contempt—has broken my heart. We will be in battle before the setting of another sun. Any man who seeks death in Indian fight can find it easily enough, and I can compel their respect in spite of themselves. They will not recognize me, living, as one of them, but dying on the field they have to place me on their roll of honor.

"But now I turn to you. What have I been, what am I, to have won such love as yours? May God in heaven forgive me for my past! All too late I hate and despise the man I have been—the man whom you loved. One last act of justice remains. If I died without it, you would mourn me faithfully, tenderly, lovingly, for years, but if I tell the truth you will see the utter unworthiness of the man, and your love will turn to contempt. It is hard to do this, knowing that in doing it I kill the only genuine regret and dry the only tear that would bless my memory, but it is the one sacrifice I can make to complete my self humiliation, and it is the one thing that is left me that will free you. It will sting at first; but, like the surgeon's knife, its cut is mercy. Nina, the very night I came to you on the bluffs, the very night you periled your honor to have that parting interview, I went to you with a lie on my lips. I had told her we were nothing to each other, you and I. More than that, I was seeking her love. I hoped I could win her, and had she loved me I would have turned from you to make her my wife. Nina, I loved Alice Renwick. Goodby. Don't mourn for me after this."

They were having a family convale at Sablon. The furlough granted Sergeant McLeod on account of wound received in action with hostile Indians would soon expire, and the question was, Should he ask an extension, apply for a discharge or go back and rejoin his troop? It was a matter on which there was much diversity of opinion. Mrs. Maynard should naturally be permitted first choice, and to her wish there was every reason for according deep and tender consideration. No words can tell of the rapture of that reunion with her long lost son. It was a scene over which the colonel could never ponder without deep emotion. The telegrams and letters by which he carefully prepared her for Frederick's coming were all insufficient. She knew well that her boy must have greatly changed and matured, but when this tall, bronzed, bearded, stalwart man sprang from the old red omnibus and threw his one serviceable arm around her trembling form the mother was utterly overcome.

Alice left them alone together a full hour before even she intruded, and little by little, as the days went by and Mrs. Maynard realized that it was really her Fred who was whistling about the cottage or booming trooper songs in his great basso profundo and glorying in his regiment and the cavalry life he had led, a wonderful content and joy shone in her handsome face. It was not until the colonel announced that it was about time for them to think of going back to Sibley that the cloud came. Fred said he couldn't go.

In fact, the colonel himself had been worrying a little over it. As Fred Renwick, the tall, distinguished young man in civilian costume, he would be welcome anywhere; but, though his garb was that of the sovereign citizen so long as his furlough lasted, there were but two weeks more of it left, and officially he was nothing more nor less than Sergeant McLeod, Troop B, 10th cavalry, and there was no precedent for a colonel's entertaining as an honored guest and social equal one of the enlisted men of the army. He rather hoped that Fred would yield to his mother's entreaties and apply for a discharge. His wound and the latent trouble with his heart would probably render it an easy matter to obtain, and yet he was ashamed of himself for the feeling.

Then there was Alice. It was hardly to be supposed that so very high bred a young woman would relish the idea of being seen around Fort Sibley on the arm of her brother, the sergeant; but, wonderful to relate, Miss Alice took a radically different view of the whole situation. So far from wishing Fred out of the army, she importuned him day after day until he got out his best uniform, with its resplendent chevrons and stripes of vivid yellow and the yellow helmet cords, though they were but humble workaday, and when he came forth in that dress, with the bronze medal on his left breast and the sharpshooters' silver cross, his tall, athletic figure showing to such advantage, his dark, southern, manly features so enhanced by contrast with his yellow facings, she clasped her hands with a cry of delight and sprang into his one available arm and threw her own about his neck and kissed him again and again.

Even mamma had to admit he looked astonishingly well, but Alice declared she would never thereafter be reconciled to seeing him in anything but a cavalry uniform. The colonel found her not at all of her mother's way of thinking. She saw no reason why Fred should leave the service. Other sergeants had won their commissions every year. Why not he? Even if it were some time in coming, was there shame or degradation in being a cavalry sergeant? Not a bit of it! Fred himself was loath to quit. He was getting a little homesick, too—homesick for the boundless life and space and air of the broad frontier, homesick for the rapid movement and vigorous hours in the saddle and on the scout. His arm was healing, and such a delight of a letter had come from his captain, telling him that the adjutant had just been to see him about the new staff of the regiment. The gallant sergeant major, a young Prussian of marked ability, had been killed early in the campaign. The vacancy must soon be filled, and the colonel and the adjutant both thought at once of Sergeant McLeod. "I won't stand in your way, sergeant," wrote his troop commander, "but you know that old Ryan is to be discharged at the end of his sixth enlistment, the 10th of next month. There is no man I would sooner see in his place as first sergeant of my troop than yourself, and I hate to lose you. But, as it will be for the gain and the good of the whole regiment, you ought to accept the adjutant's offer. All the men rejoice to hear you are recovering so fast, and all will be glad to see Sergeant McLeod back again."

His letter explained it all. She had received it with a paroxysm of passionate grief and joy, kissed it, covered it with wildest caresses before she began to read, and then, little by little, as the words unfolded before her staring eyes, turned cold as stone:

"It is my last night of life, Nina, and I am glad 'tis so. Proud and sensitive as I am, the knowledge that every

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